

PROBLEMS OF MIXED FAMILIES IN ISRAEL:

**Results of a Sociological Survey Conducted by the Association for the Rights of Mixed Families
in Summer 2008**

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Definitions

A mixed family is a family where one of the spouses is a Jew according Orthodox Halacha/law and the other does not satisfy Halachic criteria, regardless of how that member identifies or the criteria of the immediate community. Orthodox Jewish law recognizes matrilineal descent, where Jewish identity is passed on via the mother's blood line only (not via the father). Therefore, AMF distinguishes three categories of Jewishness:

- A Halakhic Jew, matrilineal descent, a person born to a Jewish mother
- A non-Halakhic Jew, patrilineal descent, a person born to a Jewish father or a grandson of a Jewish male.
- Ethnic non-Jews are completely Russian, Ukrainian, etc. (related to the above)

Data Source and Methods

The AMF survey included a nationally representative sample of adult immigrants repatriated from the FSU to Israel during 1989-2008. The sampling frame was based on the telephone directory. Mixed families' immigrants of 1989-2000 account for 70 percent of the sample.

The country's five largest cities, Jerusalem, Netanya, Haifa, Beer Sheva and Ashdod, account for a half of the respondents. Other respondents were surveyed in other cities, including Karmiel, Ashkelon, Hadera and Petah Tiqwa.

The survey, conducted by the Association for the Rights of Mixed Families (AMF) in the summer of 2008 included 518 mixed families, immigrants from the FSU, who were the primary focus of our study. This research is a continuation of a 2001 investigation of the problems of mixed families. Comparable data was available from the initial survey, and was used to develop the current questionnaire, which included some of the same items from the previous survey.

This random sample survey provided accurate information about mixed families from which the sample has been drawn. Cronbach's alpha scores a high coefficient of reliability (or consistency) 0.85, indicating that the questionnaire has satisfactory internal validity.

Our survey sought to answer four general questions:

1. Who are Israeli mixed families?
2. What are their most common challenges?
3. How do immigration and acculturation impact their identities?
4. What types of policy decisions are needed to help mixed families?

Demography and Social Status

According to the latest CBS figures, Israel's population reached a total of 7,243,600 in 2007. Numbering 5,478,200, Jews comprise 75.6%, while 315,400 equaling 4.4% are registered as "Others" – who are mostly members of mixed families, comprising non-Halachic Jewish immigrants from the FSU and ethnic non-Jews. During past seven years the increase of *Le-Lo Sivug Dat* (non-Arab Christians and those not classified by religion at the Ministry of Interior) is only 0.4%, meaning that recent immigration of mixed families has had no significant impact on the nation's population structure.

Type of Mixed Families.

Approximately 110,000 immigrant mixed families from the FSU reside in Israel. Approximately 75% are Jews and descendants of Jewish males, 25% are ethnic non-Jews (Russians, Ukrainians or any other FSU nationality) - spouses of Halakhically Jewish immigrants.

- 32% account for families where the wife is a Halachic Jew and the husband is either a Jew, non-Jew or "Russian". Likewise, their children are considered as Halachic Jews. They don't feel discrimination or alienation by society.
- 18% account for families where the wife is a non-Halachic Jew and the husband is a Halachic Jew. Their children generally identify as Jewish, however they are registered by the State as non-Jews, and herein identity and civil problems remain.
- 21% account for families where the wife is an ethnic non-Jew (Russian, etc.), and the husband is a Halachic Jew. The children are registered as *Le-Lo Sivug Dat* (not classified by religion) or as Christians.
- 10% account for families where both spouses are non-Halachic Jews. Respectively their children are not Jewish.

- 18% account for families where one of the spouses is a non-Halachic Jew and the other is "Russian".
- 0.75% account for families where both spouses are ethnic non-Jews. Probably they appeared because of divorce and remarriage.

From the secular point of view, we could say that in all mixed families the children are genetically related to the Jewish People.

In 32% of mixed families, a wife is a halakhic Jew. Consequently the children are halakhic Jews, and do not sense discrimination or alienation.

In 68% of mixed families, the wife is not Jewish and the husband is Jew or non-Halachic Jew. The serious consequences of State non-recognition of their children as Jews include problems with marriages and divorces, registration of nationality, personal identity issues, burials, immigration and citizenship status of their close relatives (spouses, parents, children from previous marriages, fourth-generation Jews).

In 2007 3% of all children born in Israel (151,700) were of women considered *Le-Lo Sivug Dat* (non-Jews). The average number of children in the Israeli family is 2.9 while to women *Le-Lo Sivug Dat* is 1.5. Among AMF survey respondents the number of children in the family is 1.3 per woman.

According to socio-economic standing mixed families do not differ much from the families of Halakhically Jewish immigrants from the FSU.

57% were employed by a recruitment firm itself or by direct contract with an employer. Only 13.5% were employed in a permanent position. Mixed family's immigrants have almost the same rates of self-employment 8 percent as other immigrants, which do not differ significantly from the numbers of self-employed Israelis.

The unemployment rate for mixed families' immigrants is 7.8 percent as opposed to 6.0% of the total Israeli workforce. In addition, two-thirds of the unemployed are over the age of 45. About one fifth of the all unemployed immigrants hold academic degrees.

Note that about 39.2 percent respondents hold academic degrees, compared to 20.3 percent of all Israelis. The share of immigrants and Israelis who are high school and college graduates is about the same - 57 %.

55% earned more than 4,000 ILS (\$1,000) a month - related figures from different sources on the immigrant wages.

However, the respondents were highly dissatisfied with their work (70%), wages (77.8%), living conditions (61.3%) and job/profession (60.1%).

Reasons for dissatisfaction vary:

- The majority of respondents were underemployed.
- Many have high skill levels and professional knowledge, but were employed in low-wage/low-skilled jobs.
- 55.6% of the respondents in spite completing studies and courses in Israel could not get a job commensurate to their professional certificate.
- 64.4% were not satisfied with their command of Hebrew
- 58.3% rent an apartment, and were not able to purchase homes

Motivation to Aliyah

For the big aliyah from the FSU of the 1990's, the wish to live in The Jewish State and anti-Semitism in their home countries were the main push/pull factors. Since 2000, economics has become the primary motive for immigration, despite significant improvement in economies throughout the FSU.

Simultaneously with the pull factor which drew them to Israel - 77%, the push factor as unwillingness to live in FSU drove them to leave their country - 69.1%. The Jewish nature of the State of Israel is still a major factor for the mixed families' immigrants – 60.6%. Another meaningful motive for immigration was the desire for family reunion – 51.3%.

Ethnic Identity

As mentioned earlier 75% members of mixed families are Jews or descendants of Jewish males.

74% of immigrants from the FSU said they clearly defined themselves as a part of the Jewish people, while 24% had difficulty answering this question. Only 2% answered negatively.

27% of respondents hide that they are not Halachic Jews. While 39% of non-Halachic Jewish women reported that they hide their "non-Jewish" identity. They explained it by wanting to avoid negative relationship towards "others" in the Israeli society (25%), at work (21%), and at school (15%).

Assimilation

Assimilation of mixed families takes place according to the same patterns which characterize Jews in the Diaspora – that is via intermarriage with the ethnic majority. 20% of the non-Halakhic Jews and "Russians" got married in Israel to native or veteran Jews. This finding demonstrates simultaneously the isolation of the ethnic "Russian" community and ongoing assimilation into Israeli Jewish society.

Why we speak about isolation: Based on the probability theory, 80% of respondents should marry with native and veteran Jews, because people normally find their partners among colleagues at work or classmates in university or school. However the social environment of mixed families is restricted to their neighborhoods and work environments where many are immigrants from the FSU.

Only 5% of respondents claimed that they have more natives among their friends than immigrants.

Our measurement of assimilation assessed also the degree to which participants adopt the ways of mainstream Israeli culture.

- ✓ 79% reckoned that their children would read, write and speak Hebrew.
- ✓ 62 % said they know Jewish culture and traditions
- ✓ 59 % said they like Israeli music
- ✓ 51% reported strong influence of Jewish culture and traditions on their lives
- ✓ 51% prefer to rest on the Jewish Sabbath, as do mainstream Israelis.
- ✓ 27% want elements of a traditional Jewish wedding, such as a huppa and other rituals. Even secular parents wish that their children would have traditional Jewish marriage.
- ✓ 22% are proud of the Israeli culture.

The Law of Return

70% are against any changes in the Law of Return. However 32.4% claimed that not every Jew could repatriate to Israel, and 14% thought that the Law of Return must be abandoned and instead to establish new criteria for repatriates. These figures pointed to problems that the participants perceive in the Law of Return.

Problems

- 72% of respondents suffer from the absence of civil marriage in Israel. Unfortunately, 75,000 children born and raised in Israel from 68% of mixed families are denied by the chief Rabbinate to employ a rabbi and use a *huppa* in their weddings. Wedding trips abroad (typically to Cyprus) is considered an outrageous humiliation and alienates them from Israeli society. (While Islamic Turkey implemented secular reforms at the beginning of the twentieth century, Jewish and democratic Israel has not yet enacted them.)
- 31% of non-Halakhic members complained that they would not be buried with their spouse.
- 27% were against registering the descendants of Jewish males as Lo Rashum, compared to 53% in 2001 when this notation appeared in their identity cards (teudath zehut).

The Supreme Court in 2002 allowed registration of reform Jewish converts. Since 2003 there is no nation/religion on the identity card. Then Minister of Interior Eli Ishaï of the Haredi Sephardi Shas political party nullified the notation of religion, in order not to accept reform converts as Jewish citizens.

- 10% of the respondents reported that they encountered difficulties to bring their non-Jewish close relatives (parents, children from former marriage, spouses) to Israel.

This figure coincides with our estimation of 9,000 of close relatives residing illegally in Israel: 6,000 children from the previous marriages or great grandsons of Jewish men, 2,000 elderly single parents and 1,000 non-Jewish spouses from abroad.

Religion

Generally participants did not practice a religion. This followed from the USSR policy where religion was outlawed by the State, and was part of official education, but a few Jewish communities managed to survive clandestinely, despite the absence of synagogues and Jewish cultural life.

However, 54% of respondents observe the *Yom Kippur* Fast, as compared to a YNet Survey claiming 63% of Israeli Jews fast on *Yom Kippur*. We used *Yom Kippur* as a certain criteria of religious belief. Such holidays as Sukkot, Hannukah, Purim, Lag ba-Omer are celebrated for the children and the whole family. Some children of non-Halakhic Jews want to decorate a

Sukkah or dress up in masks and costumes on Purim. The percentage of the mixed families observing Jewish tradition would be much higher, if the Orthodox establishment were more encouraging and respectful of this community.

- 79% considered observing Halacha on a private basis.
- 57% exhibited dissatisfaction with religious pressure in private and public life, ie the imposition of Orthodox standards in civil affairs, and desire greater separation between religion and State.
- 11% agreed that Orthodox Judaism should be kept as the State religion.

Among ethnic non-Jews, which comprise 25% of the sample, (518) one third identified themselves as Christians. It seems acceptable. They came from the countries where they belonged to the ethnic and religious Christian majority. However, such self-perception does not coincide with deep religious beliefs. They reason it's better to be a Christian in Israel than without any religious identity: since the Orthodox/State religious authorities rejected them, they chose the other. (In Israel it is possible to marry as Christians and to be buried according to the Christian tradition.)

However, these figures do not confirm the data of Central Bureau of Statistics, which defined all the ethnic non-Jews as Christians. Thus, 12% of ethnic non-Jews percept themselves as Jews, 38% fast on Yom Kippur which proves the ongoing assimilation.

Only half of the respondents answered the questions concerning their wish to join an existing Jewish stream or community in Israel.

From those who answered:

- ✓ 17% would join a secular (cultural) movement
- ✓ 10% - to the Progressive/Reform Movement
- ✓ 8% - to the Conservative movement
- ✓ 5.5% - to orthodoxy

34% wanted to join a Russian speaking Jewish community and 11% wanted to join a Hebrew speaking Jewish community.

62% are not interested in any movements or communities.

Relationship towards Jewish People and Israel

Mixed families' self-esteem was also assessed in order to measure the degree to which ethnicity is considered to be an important aspect of respondents' self-image.

- 73% of respondents consider mixed families as part of Jewish people, and 75% among ethnic non-Jews. It's an answer to the allegation of some politicians from right wing parties who qualify them as a bad national minority.
- 74% hang state flag of Israel on the Independence Day
- 65% celebrate Jewish and Israeli holidays

These figures explain the high readiness of mixed families members and their children to serve in the IDF (Israel Defense Forces).

Voting Behavior

Respondents were asked to specify all parties. A detailed account of the projected vote indicated:

Israel Beiteinu would get 21%,

Likud (10%) would take a slight lead over Kadima (5%).

Trailing further behind were Labor and Meretz, each 2%. The other parties would get 5%.

Right-wing parties retained a lead among mixed families as in the whole among immigrants from the FSU. The Israeli general election will be held on February 10, 2009.

24% didn't want to participate in election, because they didn't believe in any party.

31% did not yet make their choice.

Political parties interested in the 110,000 votes of mixed families should learn to address their problems, and propose real solutions.

Yerida (Emigration from Israel)

According to figures of Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) from 1990 to 2005 111,000 immigrants from the FSU emigrated. One third were non-Jewish citizens, equal to the proportion of non-Jewish immigrants from the FSU.

According to AMF survey 40% of respondents are not sure that will stay in Israel. In this regard mixed families do not differ from other immigrants from the FSU.

Motivators for their desire to emigrate among mixed families are a sense of humiliation, alienation and despair in Israeli government and society. Emigration intentions were correlated to the following problems:

1. Registration as Lo Rashum
2. Absence of civil marriages
3. Difficulties with conversion

Age correlates to emigration intentions: younger respondents desire more to leave Israel. It is very sad that Israel absorbed these people; educated, trained many in industry and technology, only to “donate” them to countries with greater opportunity.

26% of those desiring to emigrate indicated an upgrade in their quality of life as a major factor.

Destination countries include:

- ✓ 15.8% desire to return to the FSU.
- ✓ 12.5% percent would choose Canada,
- ✓ 12.4% EU countries,
- ✓ 9.7% USA,
- ✓ 3.7% Australia
- ✓ (53% will remain in Israel.)

Conversion

According to Orthodox/State Law immigrants could convert, but 72.8% never intended to convert. Among their reasons are:

- 18.7% fear the long, complicated conversion process and fear rejection by the authorities.
- 17.4% said that conversion will restrict their “freedom of choice” and independence.
- 20% of non-Jewish spouses were reluctant to attend even the classes for conversion.
- 12.7% didn't want to send their children to religious schools.

Among those who considered conversion:

24.5% intended to convert

2.7% have converted, which is the same result of our 2001 survey, wherein 24% intended and 2% converted. Despite serious State campaigns to promote conversion (with a huge annual budget of 65 million NIS) the low conversion rate has not changed!

One of the most important reasons for this apparent failure is that children of Jewish fathers consider themselves Jewish. For example, a young man who is the son of Jewish man and "half-Jewish" mother said, "Why I must convert while my neighbor does not, when only his grandmother from his mother's side is Jewish?! He's registered as Jewish, but shops in non-kosher supermarkets, goes to the beach on Shabbat and does nothing Jewish." This is an universal sentiment among non-Halakhic Jews, who consider the strict requirements upon converts by the religious establishment unjust when compared to their laissez-faire policies toward secular Israelis or Halachic Jews whose genealogy is even "weaker" than their own.

Ways to Resolve the Problems

According to Zeev Belsky, Executive Director of The Jewish Agency for Israel (JAFI), there are no Jewish families in The Diaspora which do not have non-Jewish relatives. Among aliyah in 2000 80% of the repatriating families from the FSU comprised mixed families against 30% in the 1990's.

Here are our recommendations:

- It's in the interest of the State to recognize the children of Jewish fathers as Jews and eliminate the status of unregistered "Others", and necessary to pass the bill of MK Beilin on Patrilineal Descent. The law would require Israel's Population Registry to register as Jewish all Israelis born of Jewish fathers. The bill applies to hundreds of thousands of Jews from the FSU and thousands more whose Jewishness is acknowledged by the Reform Movement.
- Adopt a civil marriage law that allows citizens the right to choose a marriage ceremony according to their conscience.
- Establish alternative burial grounds for those intermarried couples who want to be buried together
- Reform policies for family reunification, and provide immediate citizenship status on a humanitarian basis to 9,000 single close relatives who couldn't get any legal civil status under existing laws.
- Ease conversion policies for minors and soldiers.
- Promote Reform and Conservative conversions, because they are more friendly and sensitive towards the feelings of new immigrants.
- Enact programs like Birthright/Taglit for new, young immigrants, in order to strengthen their Jewish identity, familiarize them with Israel, and stimulate their engagement into mainstream Israeli society to reinforce their sense of belonging to the Jewish people.

Narratives

Anna (24) came to Israel from Ukraine at age sixteen. After high school, Anna was conscripted into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) at age 18. During her army service she met Oleg (25). They served together on same base and fell in love. After completing their service, lacking financial support from their families that is common among Israeli post-army youth, they rented an apartment in Beer Sheva, because they couldn't afford to rent in the more popular "center" of the country. When they decided to get married, they discovered that they are "Others," ineligible to get married in the country for which they were ready to sacrifice their lives. Both of them are non-Halachic Jews, whose father is Jewish but not their mother. "I was at first shocked and felt embarrassed and humiliated." said Anna. I considered Israel my Homeland. I served on active duty in a unit where I could get killed to Defend Israel against our enemies, because I felt the need to contribute the most to my country. When I had been conscripted into the IDF, nobody cared about the "degree" of my Jewishness. But when I wanted to have a family, The State just violated one of my most basic human rights. We felt that State betrayed us."

Although they could not afford a trip to get married in Cyprus or Prague, where many others like them go to get married, Anna and Oleg continued their "family" life without registration. The Rabbinate and Interior Ministry recognize civil marriages from abroad, only not in Israel... They decided to borrow and save the money to get married abroad, but Anna became pregnant, and could not travel, so they had to live together in a non-registered relationship.

When their baby Leon was born, expenses increased, further delaying their marriage abroad. Even though Leon has the surname of his father, and they could prove that they were married by common law, the State refused to grant them any child allowances, on the pretext that Anna is not considered either a single mother or married women. Anna and Oleg hope that improvement their financial status will allow them to afford legal expenses to register their partnership. By then, they will have missed at least seven years of available State support for raising their child.

Recorded by Vera Merinov, Beer Sheva, August 2008

Tom and Rimma Lapitzki, Beer Sheva

"We had no choice but to get married abroad, because one of us is not registered as Jewish. Israeli law violates the right to marry of non-Jewish immigrants, and we consider this an injustice towards us.

We flew abroad alone, because we could not afford to take family or friends. The wedding ceremony was not we wished to be: held in an empty hall, the bride had to prepared her for makeup and hair in the W.C. We felt abandoned and alone, without friends and family and the the essential moral support of our parents. All together the marriage trip to Prague cost us 20,000 shekels, including registration, photography and related costs.

Of course, we will make a ceremony in Israel to celebrate our marriage with relatives and friends, but it's awkward after the fact. We are not going to make a secular ceremony, because we would like a State official to be present and provide us with our marriage license. However, according to Jewish tradition and Israeli law, only rabbis or those authorized by the Rabbinate may perform weddings. Unfortunately, there is no separation of religion and state in Israel, and no provision for non-Jews (who are not Christian or Muslim) to marry, which violates a person's fundamental rights to make a family."

Recorded by Olga Goncharenko, student of Ben-Gurion University, August, 2008

Maria (68) lives in the northern town of Yokneam.

A small thin woman looking to be about the age of 70 knocked at the door. "Is the conversion course here?" she asked. "Yes," answered the teachers of the Institute of Jewish Studies, "Our course will enrich your knowledge of Judaism and the history and traditions of the Jewish People."

At one of the first lessons, Sophia, a teacher, asked the students to introduce themselves and to explain why they had decided to take the conversion course. Maria told why she decided to convert to Judaism, "I'm 68 years old and my husband is 84. We immigrated to Israel almost 20 years ago with the big wave of aliyah (immigration) from the Rostov Region in the southern part of European Russia. My husband is a Jew, and his grandchildren from a previous marriage live in Israel, also. They help him and frequently visit. Now married for 40 years, I have no relatives and no children. Recently my husband began to fall ill, and worries that we would be buried separately; him in a Jewish cemetery, and me in a non-Jewish cemetery or in some private kibbutz cemetery. My husband doesn't want to be buried without me."

"Are you observing Jewish tradition?" – one of the students asked Maria.

"Certainly, I do. I cannot imagine living without observing Jewish traditions. All my life I have carried this book," and she showed us her time-worn Siddur (a Jewish prayer book).

"We keep the Sabbath: Every Friday I clean my house, prepare fine food and drink and light Shabbat candles. After my husband recites Kiddush, we bless our meal over Challah. We don't travel on Shabbath, and observe all Jewish holidays. We fast on Yom Kippur, Tish B'Av

and Tzom Gedalia. For Pesach, I clean the house completely from hametz (leaven), kasher all my dishes...”

It became obvious that she had been observant for tens of years. Even before the conversion course, this woman led an observant life, but according to the Ministry of Interior, she is a non-Jewish "Russian," and has no right to be buried together with her husband.

The desire to be buried together compelled her to attend the courses two times a week, traveling from Yokneam to Haifa on two buses and returning home late at night.

During two months Maria didn't miss a lesson, and then she began to attend more and more rarely. She explained that her husband fell seriously ill. Also, the studies became very difficult, because she began to experience problems with her eyesight and memory. Learning Jewish history in detail with a lot of dates and events was not feasible at her age. During the 10 month course,, Maria stopped coming and answering calls, so nobody knows what happened to her. Perhaps, her husband became too ill, and maybe she has also fallen ill. What is clear is that they will not be buried together.

Recorded by Valeria Zhadovetz – survey coordinator, Haifa University, June, 2008

Lubov Verkhovsky (46) was registered as non-Jewish, when she made aliya with her Jewish husband, Yuri, in May 2007.

Lubov and Yuri got married in 2002 and are raising their biological daughter (7). It was the second marriage for both of them, and both have children from previous marriages. Yuri's daughter (21) from his first marriage came to Israel with the family, and now serves in the IDF. She calls Lubov "mother" and they have a very close relationship. Lubov has two sons from her first marriage, 23 and 24 years-old. They were not able to come with the family to Israel, remained in Kyrgyzstan, but hoped the family would send them an invitation to visit.

Lubov and Yuri had a stable family-owned business in Kyrgyzstan, where he fulfilled his parental duties without problem. They didn't consider adoption of Lubov's children, because there was no need for it, and they didn't intend to move from their hometown.

The decision to repatriate came spontaneously to Lubov and Yuri, who wanted to provide more opportunities for their daughters' future, and they have integrated successfully into Israeli society. The parents are satisfied with their absorption, and do not regret moving to Israel, despite occasional nostalgia. At their age repatriation was a courageous move.

In March 2008 they applied for tourist visas to visit Israel for Lubov's sons, but were denied . In April 2008 their appeal was rejected again. The result is that Lubov is denied the right to

see her children, and her children cannot even visit their siblings. Yuri, who brought up these boys, also cannot welcome them in his new homeland.

Recorded by Yulia Breslavsky, student of Hebrew University, June, 2008, Rishon LeZion

Constantine and Liza are a young couple from the small Negev town of Arad, who have lived together unmarried for four years, and are raising Maxim, their 1-year-old son.

Q. Constantine could you tell me why are you not married, yet?

A. I am a Halachic Jew, but only Liza's grandfather is Jewish. So, we couldn't marry in Israel. Liza didn't want to convert, and we couldn't afford a marriage trip abroad. We barely earn enough to cover necessities. Liza is still a student, and having Maxim I put my higher education out of question. When we purchased our apartment two years ago with a mortgage, we chose that investment instead of trip abroad, but it's not clear when we could pay back this loan.

Q. Liza, (if you are not an observant *Christian?*), why you haven't converted to Judaism?

A. Because it would be wrong: I deem it degrading both to myself and to Judaism. While I respect the religious beliefs of others, I could attend the Ulpan Giur (Conversion Course), and fake being Orthodox. To my mind conversion is a very serious and honest choice. Furthermore, university studies and childcare don't leave me free time. The situation with civil marriages is outrageous and dishonest. We have lived together so long, have a child and can't register our marriage, only because one of us is not Jewish "enough". My sister is studying at the Conversion Course now, but she admits that she is not going to keep an Orthodox lifestyle; she feels that she has no choice.

Q. Constantine, what's your solution to this problem?

A. Do you mean in the framework of the State or my family? Actually, I have no solution for either the State nor for my family. Perhaps in a year or two, when Maxim will be ready to go to kindergarten, we will be able to save the money for the flight abroad. Now we have no hope that we could register here earlier. For ourselves we made a wedding ceremony and party, where Liza sewed her wedding dress. We celebrate this date annually, but we want the State to recognize our marriage, not only our friends and relatives. Liza has taken my surname. We know about numerous attempts to pass a law permitting civil marriages, but we are pessimistic. We know about too many people who need it, but Israel doesn't maintain equal rights. Even though we pay taxes like other Jewish citizens, we receive the rights of

"gasterbeiter"(guest worker) – it is a very undemocratic aspect of Israeli life. Due to this we are considering leaving Israel to return to Russia, but this is just one of many forms of protest.

*Recorded by Veronika Zelmanovich, student of Ben-Gurion University
July, 2008 Arad, Negev*

Inna (27) has a Jewish father, and lives in Kiryat Ata, a suburb north of Haifa. She immigrated alone to Israel in 2000 from the Ukraine. She received a degree in Nursing from Tel Aviv College, completed a course in Massage Therapy, and now works as a nurse in Haifa's Rambam hospital. She met Dmitri through mutual friends. Dmitri made aliya alone from Saint Petersburg, and became a chef at one of the prestigious restaurants in Haifa. They decided to get married, and even though Dmitri is Jewish according to State/Orthodox Halakah, the law prohibits intermarriage in Israel. They could not afford the expense and the time for a marriage trip abroad, so they have been living together for seven years. .

Dmitri worked without benefits for paid holidays, 12 hours every day till late at night. Inna worked as a night-shift nurse with only occasional day shifts. They went to bed early in the morning, and went to work in the afternoon. They finally managed to take a short vacation in Saint Petersburg, to get acquainted with Dmitri 's parents and family. His parents suggested they remain in Russia, where they could help the young couple with finding a residence and work, and where their marriage would be recognized. Although young Russians adults in Israel are beginning to move back to the FSU, Inna's pregnancy persuaded the couple to postpone such a move, until after the delivery.

In December, 2007 their son was born at the Rothschild Hospital, where "We were warned that there could be problems with official registration of the child, due to our unofficial marital status. So, when we demanded the birth certificate directly from the hospital upon discharge, it refused to produce it. The hospital would not even give them the form for proving that he is the father of the child, because the Interior Ministry has to authorize that. Officially fatherless, the child was discharged with "dash" on his birth certificate in place of his father's name. We could not even imagine that such things could happen in a liberal and democratic country as Israel. Our Jewish friends who gave birth 3 weeks earlier had no such problems, even though they were not married.

After discharge baby care completely absorbed the young couple, and Dmitri's mother visited to help them. Unfortunately, they became aware too late that they had only two weeks to include Dmitri's name on the birth certificate. So, in February, 2008 they consulted the NGO "Femida" – Center of Civil and Socio-Legal Support for "Russian" immigrants. Their representative persuaded us to sign a three year contract requiring monthly payment of 200

shekels in exchange for Femida's legal support for three years. After showing us only inability to make progress on our case over two weeks, we decided to break the contract.

"Again in March 2008 we were disappointed by a private lawyer who started an application process, but concluded that the difficulty of the case will require more costs than estimated. So, we had to drop his services, too. Finally, another lawyer assessed our case and convinced us that she could do the job. In order to pay attorney's fees, Dmitri left his work, so as to receive his retirement benefits early. Now we are collecting all the necessary inquiries, certificates, testimonies from neighbors, friends and relatives, in order to prove that their union is not fictitious. They must be very convincing in court. If the application is rejected, then only in 3 years will it be possible to re-apply.

There is little chance to get a positive decision without expensive DNA testing, but Dmitri is ready to pay any price. Inna explained that she feels overwhelmed by fear of rejection and helplessness, "We are exhausted from this fuss and trouble." Dmitri commented, "How embarrassed I felt: Too many fathers abandon their children, and here I must stoop to beg for recognition from a callous bureaucracy."

Recorded by Natalia Evdash, student of Haifa University, June, 2008 Kiryat Ata, Haifa District

Vera (27) was married in the Ukraine, and immigrated to Israel with her second husband, a non-Jew, after which they separated. Her eldest son Roman is eight. Here, Vera met Anatoly, during her divorce process. They decided to live together and have a baby, and she gave birth one month after her divorce was finalized. Therefore, Amir was born out wedlock. Now all of them – Vera, Anatoly, Roman and baby Amir live together. However, Vera and Amir carry one surname with no father listed on the birth certificate, while Amir must carry Anatoly's name.

Q. How is it that formally Amir is not the son of Anatoly?

A. Because the necessary time from separation to divorce from my previous spouse had not passed before the birth, then the Ministry of Interior refused to register Amir's father.

Q. What must you do to resolve the situation?

A. We must do a DNA test to prove that Anatoly fathered Amir. We paid for the very expensive test, and waited results. The Interior Ministry explained that it will take time to produce the Paternity Recognition Certificate for Anatoly, and to re-register the birth of Amir. Meanwhile Amir has my surname, but he does not have an Israeli passport, prohibiting travel abroad.

Q. Why aren't you married yet?

A. The "problem" is that Anatoly is a halakhic Jew. This took a long time to prove with the help of his mother, father, close relatives and friends. He wanted to get married according to Jewish law. I am a Jew through the patrilineal line, and consequently a non-Jew in Israel. I should convert to Judaism.

Q. You do not want to convert, do you?

A. I have tried, but it was hard. I cannot lie, and say that I observe Kashrut (Jewish dietary laws), and at the same time eat pork at home. I do not think that's right. Studying Judaism was not difficult, because it was interesting.

Q. What are you going to do?

A. Well, there exist some alternatives. The first one is to bribe rabbis for facilitating a quickie conversion. The second is to go through conversion procedure, which normally takes one to two years. However, I can't force myself to finish this. The third – to get married abroad, but it will not help my children. I would like that they become Jews according to Orthodox Halakha, that they won't be "Others" in their own country.

Q. Have your sons been circumcised?

A. Yes, both of them. The senior decided for himself that he wanted to be circumcised, and he will probably convert in the army. There is also the problem with bar-mitzvah. My senior son is not eligible for a traditional ceremony of being called up to the Torah in a bet Kneset on his thirteenth Hebrew birthday. Well, of course, he can make a party, but it's not the religious ceremony that he wants with all his classmates, with a rabbi, laying tefillin. I have no idea how to handle the situation, but I think something must be done for him. Finally, that our newborn has to have my surname is really unreasonable. It is absurd that in one family of four there are three different surnames.

Q. Does Anatoly wish to adopt your senior child Roman?

A. Anatoly wished to adopt, but the adoption process takes a very long time. Roman's father in Ukraine signed a notarized statement giving permission for Roman to leave. He willingly abandoned his son, and has never shown any interest in him - no calls, no contact, no help and no financial responsibility. I had the documents translated into Hebrew, and hired a lawyer to obtain judicial deprivation of parental rights. But the local lawyers told me that only the Israeli court decides on deprivation of parental rights. While it is possible under these circumstances for Anatoly to adopt him, it would be difficult. It would cost much more time and

money. You cannot imagine how much we have already spent on translating the documents, on the DNA test and on legal fees. We are exhausted!

Although Roman relates to Anatoly as his "father" in every way, State organs refuse to acknowledge this fact. His school, for example, refuses to allow Anatoly to speak with teachers. Even though Anatoly is a veteran resident with perfect Hebrew, and I request that they consider him the father, administrators and teachers tell him that, since he is not the legal father, then he has no rights in decision making. All this red tape when Roman left the Ukraine at age 3 and I was divorced when he was less than a year! He never knew his biological father. Anatoly has been raising Roman for about five years. The situation is debilitating to all of us, and must be resolved!

Recorded by Larisa Zimin, journalist, Netanya, August, 2008, Netanya

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